

Facing Yourself

by [Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche](#) and [Pema Chödrön](#) | January 26, 2018

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You are a warrior when you have the bravery to face who you are, without fear, embarrassment, or denial. This warriorship is the basis of the spiritual path, says Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Through the practice of sitting meditation, the warrior discovers basic goodness. Introduction by Pema Chödrön.



Photo by [Silvia Sala](#).

Introduction by Pema Chödrön

For me, contemplating the teachings of Chögyam Trungpa is like dipping into a well from which endless wisdom can be drawn. I have been going back to this source for more than thirty years now, and I always find that it contains something to inspire me, to challenge me, and to help me on my path. More than ever, with the great problems that our society and each of us are facing, Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings are there to help us.

How is it that the words of someone who passed away more than two decades ago can feel so amazingly fresh, up to date, and applicable to what we are facing at this time? It's not so strange, really, because Rinpoche was always addressing what's happening in this very moment, and that kind of direct, spontaneous teaching never goes out of fashion.

As well, he seemed to know what problems we would face in this millennium. There is so much speed, anxiety, and fearfulness in us and all around us, and this is exactly what he speaks to. We can try to hide, but deep down we know that the only real choice is to embrace and befriend the uncertainty of these times. We really need to do this *now*—we don't have any time to lose.

There is a great deal of strength in nonaggression, or peacefully abiding.

Chögyam Trungpa's way of waking us up is provocative, heartfelt, and delightful. I have decided to use *Smile at Fear*, the book from which this teaching is taken, as the basis for some of the programs that I'm teaching in the next year, because I feel that working with fear in the way Rinpoche presents is so helpful and relevant to these times. I find that his Shambhala teachings, which are the core of this book, help us to open our hearts and to find real bravery, so that we can extend ourselves to others. This is based on being vulnerable yet strong. There is a great deal of strength in nonaggression, or peacefully abiding. This is what Rinpoche means by being a Shambhala warrior. I think it is something we all aspire to. As he invites us to do, let's look honestly into ourselves, so that we can be fearless, gentle people.

—Pema Chödrön

Facing Yourself

Our subject matter is warriorship. Anyone who is interested in hearing the truth, which in Buddhism we call the dharma; anyone who is interested in finding out about him or herself; and anyone who is interested in practicing meditation is basically a warrior.

Many approaches to spirituality and to life in general are influenced by cowardice. If you are afraid of seeing yourself, you may use spirituality or religion as a way of looking at yourself without seeing anything about yourself at all. When people are embarrassed by themselves, there is no fearlessness involved. However, if someone is willing to look at himself or herself, to explore and practice wakefulness on the spot, he or she is a warrior.

“Warrior” here is a translation of the Tibetan word *pawo*. *Pa* means “brave,” and *wo* makes it “a person who is brave.” The warrior tradition we are discussing is a tradition of bravery. You might have the idea of a warrior as someone who wages war. But in this case, we are not talking about warriors as those who engage in warfare. Warriorship here refers to fundamental bravery and fearlessness.

Warriorship is based on overcoming cowardice and our sense of being wounded. If we feel fundamentally wounded, we may be afraid that somebody is going to put stitches in us to heal our wound. Or maybe we have already had the stitches put in, but we dare not let anyone take them out. The approach of the warrior is to face all those situations of fear or cowardice. The general goal of warriorship is to have no fear. But the ground of warriorship is fear itself. In order to be fearless, first we have to find out what fear is.

Fear is nervousness; fear is anxiety; fear is a sense of inadequacy, a feeling that we may not be able to deal with the challenges of everyday life at all. We feel that life is overwhelming. People may use tranquilizers or yoga to suppress their fear: they just try to float through life. They may take occasional

breaks to go to Starbucks or the mall. We have all sorts of gimmicks and gadgets that we use in the hope that we might experience fearlessness simply by taking our minds off of our fear.

Where does fear come from? It comes from basic bewilderment. Where does basic bewilderment come from? It comes from being unable to harmonize or synchronize mind and body. In the sitting practice of meditation, if you have a bad seat on the cushion, you are unable to synchronize your mind and body. You don't have a sense of your place or your posture. This applies to the rest of life as well. When you don't feel grounded or properly seated in your world, you cannot relate to your experience or to the rest of the world.

So the problem begins in a very simple way. When body and mind are unsynchronized, you feel like a caricature of yourself, almost like a primordial idiot or a clown. In that situation, it is very difficult to relate to the rest of the world.

That is a simplified version of what is known as the setting-sun mentality: having completely lost track of the basic harmony of being human. The idea of the setting sun is that the sun is already setting in your world, and you cannot rise above the darkness. You feel that there is only misery, clouds, the dungeon, life in the gutter. To compensate for that, you might go to a very dark dungeon with bad lighting, where you get drunk. That is called a club. You dance like a drunken ape who has forgotten bananas and its home in the jungle a long time ago. So it feasts on cheap beer while wiggling its tail. There is nothing wrong with dancing per se, but in this case it is a form of escaping from or avoiding your fear. It's very sad. That is the setting sun. It's a dead end, a very dead end.

Many people try to find a spiritual path where they do not have to face themselves but where they can still liberate themselves. In truth, that is impossible.

In contrast to that, the Great Eastern Sun is the sun that is fully risen in your life. It is the sun of wakefulness, the sun of human dignity. It is Great because it represents upliftedness and the qualities of openness and gentleness. You have an uplifted sense of posture or place in your world, which we call having good head and shoulders. It is in the East because you have a smile on your face. East is the concept of dawn. When you look outside first thing in the morning, you see light coming from the East, even before the sun rises. So the East is the smile you have when you wake up. The sun is about to rise. Fresh air is coming with the dawn. So the sun is in the East and it is Great.

Here, the *Sun* is a completely mature sun, the sun that you see in the sky around ten o'clock in the morning. It is the opposite of the image of the drunken ape dancing at midnight under the light of dim electric bulbs. The contrast is astounding, so extraordinary! The Great Eastern Sun vision is uplifted and awake, fresh and precise.

We could get into further details, but first we should discuss the fundamental understanding of fear and fearlessness. One of the main obstacles to fearlessness is the habitual patterns that allow us to deceive ourselves. Ordinarily, we don't let ourselves experience ourselves fully. That is to say, we have a fear of facing ourselves. Experiencing the innermost core of their existence is embarrassing to a lot of people. Many people try to find a spiritual path where they do not have to face themselves but where they can still liberate themselves—liberate themselves from themselves, in fact. In truth, that is impossible. We cannot do that. We have to be honest with ourselves. We have to see our gut, our real shit, our most undesirable parts. We have to see that. That is the foundation of warriorship and the basis of conquering fear. We have to face our fear; we have to look at it, study it, work with it, and practice meditation with it.

We also have to give up the notion of a divine savior, which has nothing to do with what religion we belong to, but refers to the idea of someone or something who will save us without our having to go through any pain. In fact, giving up that kind of false hope is the first step. We have to be with ourselves. We have to be real people. There is no way of beating around the bush, hoping for the best. If you are really interested in working with yourself, you can't lead that kind of double life, adopting ideas, techniques, and concepts of all kinds, simply in order to get away from yourself. That is what we call spiritual materialism: hoping that you can have a nice sleep, under anesthetics, and by the time you

awaken, everything will be sewn up. Everything will be healed. In that case, you do not have to go through any pain or problems.

In a genuine spiritual discipline, you cannot do that. You might convince yourself that there is some religious discipline that will allow you to pass directly into spiritual ecstasy. You might convince yourself that this world does not exist; only the realm of the spirit exists. However, later on, something will bounce back on you, because we cannot cheat the basic norm, which is known as karma, or the law of cause and effect. We cannot cheat that.

We have to face quite a lot. We have to give up a lot. You may not want to, but still you have to, if you want to be kind to yourself. It boils down to that. On the other hand, if you want to hurt yourself by indulging in setting-sun neurosis, that is your business and it's nobody else's business. Nobody can save you from yourself. Go ahead. But you are bound to regret it later on, profoundly so. By then, you may have collected so much garbage that it will be almost impossible to undo the situation. That would be a very wretched place to end up.

Often, we prefer to hurt ourselves. It seems to feel better to pursue our habitual patterns than to help ourselves. You may have heard in school that studying hard will be good for you. Your parents may have told you to eat all the food on your plate, because it's good for you. There are a lot of people starving all over the world, and you are fortunate to have this meal in front of you. Eat it up. Maybe such advice is helpful. At the time you heard these things, they may have seemed completely unskillful, in terms of your state of mind. However, such orthodoxy and expression of discipline may have an element of truth in them.

We must decide to look at ourselves and experience ourselves honestly. Some of us find ourselves in the most wretched and profoundly degrading situations. Some of us may have brilliant and good situations happening. Whatever the case may be, whether our exploration brings hope or fear, we look at ourselves. We need to find ourselves, face ourselves, and beyond that, give up our privacy, our inhibition.

There may be a semantic problem here with my use of the word *privacy* in the English language. The point is that when you give up privacy, that is the only time you can be with yourself. Our normal version of privacy is not really privacy. We say, "I need my privacy." If you are bottling yourself up with your so called privacy, you find yourself getting in your own way. There is no privacy in that situation. The privacy does not exist. Instead, you feel completely bombarded with internal emotions and thoughts, which take away from your chance to be with yourself and relax with yourself completely. Once you begin to give up privacy, you open your heart and your whole existence to the rest of the world, and then you find greater privacy. You find that an actual discovery of yourself is taking place.

The only way to relax with yourself is to open your heart. Then you have a chance to see who you are. This experience is like opening a parachute. When you jump out of an airplane and open the chute, you are there in the sky by yourself. Sometimes it is very frightening, but on the other hand, when you take this step, the whole situation, the whole journey, makes sense. You have to actually do it, and then you will understand. Giving up privacy is not so much a process of education and logic, but it happens on the spot, by doing so.

Whenever you hear a sweet and beautiful sound, you are hearing your own basic goodness.

One has to give up inhibition, but that does not become exhibitionism. You remain true to yourself if you give up inhibition. You just give up your privacy, your sense of shyness, and the longing to have a personal "trip." When you give that up, it doesn't mean you have to become an exhibitionist; but you could be a real person. When you give up smoking cigarettes, you don't have to proclaim what you have done. Maybe nobody will notice. You just do not smoke anymore. It might be sad for you that nobody can appreciate your virtue, but on the other hand, so what? When you give up your privacy, you still stand and walk on two feet like other human beings. You look at the universe with two eyes, and it is okay, fine. You have become a fully decent human being for the first time, but you do not have to proclaim that. You stop at red lights. You drive when it is green. It's a boring world. One has

to take the first step. Then you find that you still maintain the same old standing, which is sometimes terrible, sometimes good, but still standing steady. It is very humorous in some ways, maybe painfully so. Maybe not! In any case, welcome to the warrior's world.

Then you begin to realize that you have something in yourself that is fundamentally, basically good. It transcends the notion of good or bad. Something that is worthwhile, wholesome, and healthy exists in all of us. For the first time, you are seeing the Great Eastern Sun. Goodness arises from discovering the vision of the Great Eastern Sun. This goodness is basic or primordial goodness that you have. You possess it already. Such goodness is synonymous with bravery. It is always there. Whenever you see a bright and beautiful color, you are witnessing your own inherent goodness. Whenever you hear a sweet and beautiful sound, you are hearing your own basic goodness. Whenever you taste something sweet or sour, you are experiencing your own basic goodness. If you are in a room and you open the door and walk outside, there is a sudden breeze of fresh air. Such an experience may last only a second, but that whiff of fresh air is the smell of basic goodness.

Things like that are always happening to you, but you have been ignoring them, thinking that they are mundane and unimportant, purely coincidences of an ordinary nature. However, it is worthwhile to take advantage of anything that happens to you that has that particular nature of goodness. You begin to realize that there is nonaggression happening all around you in your life, and you are able to feel the freshness of realizing your goodness, again and again.

But you can't jump the gun. First, let us look at ourselves. If you put one hundred percent of your heart into facing yourself, then you connect with this unconditional goodness. Whereas, if you only put fifty percent into the situation, you are trying to bargain with the situation, and nothing very much will happen. When you are genuine in the fullest sense, you do not need the conditional judgment of good or bad, but you actually *are* good rather than you *become* good.

If we face ourselves properly, fully, then we find that something else exists there, beyond facing ourselves. Something exists in us that is basically awake, as opposed to asleep. We find something intrinsically cheerful and fundamentally pride-worthy. That is to say, we don't have to con ourselves. We discover genuine one hundred percent gold, not even twenty-four karat. According to the Buddhist tradition, that is discovering our buddhanature. In Sanskrit, buddhanature is *tathagatagarbha*, which means that the essence of the tathagatas, the buddhas who have already gone beyond, exists in us.

We are fundamentally awake. We ourselves are already good. It's not just a potential. It's more than potential. Of course, we will have hesitation again and again in believing that. You might think this goodness is just an old myth, another trick to cheer us up. But no! It is real and good. Buddhanature exists in us, and because of that, we are here. Your basic buddhanature brought you here.

The heart of the matter, the technique that seems to be the only way to realize this, is the sitting practice of meditation. Meditation is the key to seeing yourself as well as to seeing beyond yourself. Seeing yourself is the first aspect, discovering all sorts of terrible things going on in you. Facing the possibilities and the realities of that is not all that bad. If you begin to do that, you are being an honest person. Then, beyond that, you have to have further vision. Your honesty allows you to realize your goodness. You do possess Buddha in your heart.

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[About Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche](#)

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1940-1987) is recognized for playing a pivotal role in the transmission of genuine Buddhistharma to the West. One of the first Tibetan Buddhist teachers to come to America, he established Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado and an organization of some 200 meditation centers worldwide known as Shambhala International. In addition to his best selling books on the Buddhist teachings, including *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* and *The Myth of Freedom*, he is the author of two books on the Shambhala warrior tradition: *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, and *Great Eastern Sun: The Wisdom of Shambhala*.



[About Pema Chödrön](#)

With her powerful teachings, bestselling books, and retreats attended by thousands, Pema Chödrön is today's most popular American-born teacher of Buddhism. In *The Wisdom of No Escape*, *The Places that Scare You*, and other important books, she has helped us discover how difficulty and uncertainty can be opportunities for awakening. She serves as resident teacher at Gampo Abbey Monastery in Nova Scotia and is a student of Dzigar Kongtrul, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, and the late Chögyam Trungpa. For more, visit pemachodronfoundation.org.

The Tender Heart of the Warrior

by [Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche](#) | March 10, 2018

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The ground of fearlessness, says Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, is renouncing hard-heartedness and allowing ourselves to be tender, sad, and fully present.

The ground of fearlessness, which is the basis for overcoming doubt and wrong belief, is the development of renunciation. Renunciation here means overcoming that very hard and tough, aggressive mentality which wards off any gentleness that might come into our hearts. Fear does not allow fundamental tenderness to enter into us. When tenderness tinged by sadness touches our heart, we know that we are in contact with reality. We feel it. That contact is genuine, fresh, and quite raw. That sensitivity is the basic experience of warriorship, and it is the key to developing fearless renunciation.

Sometimes people find that being tender and raw is threatening and seemingly exhausting. Openness seems demanding and energy-consuming, so they prefer to cover up their tender heart. Vulnerability can sometimes make you nervous. It is uncomfortable to feel so real, so you want to numb yourself. You look for some kind of anesthetic, anything that will provide you with entertainment. Then you can forget the discomfort of reality. People don't want to live with their basic rawness for even fifteen minutes. When people say they are bored, often they mean that they don't want to experience the sense of emptiness, which is also an expression of openness and vulnerability. So they pick up the newspaper or read anything else that's lying around the room—even reading what it says on a cereal box to keep themselves entertained. The search for entertainment to babysit your boredom soon becomes legitimized as laziness. Such laziness actually involves a lot of exertion. You have to constantly crank things up to occupy yourself with, overcoming your boredom by indulging in laziness.

For the warrior, fearlessness is the opposite of that approach. Fearlessness is a question of learning how to be. Be there all along: that is the message. That is quite challenging in what we call the setting-

sun world, the world of neurotic comfort where we use everything to fill up the space. On the other hand, if we are in touch with basic goodness, we are always relating to the world directly, choicelessly, whether the energy of the situation demands a destructive or a constructive response. The idea of renunciation is to relate with whatever arises with a sense of sadness and tenderness. We reject the aggressive, hard-core street-fighter mentality. The neurotic upheavals created by overcoming conflicting emotions, or the kleshas, arise from ignorance, or *avidya*. This is fundamental ignorance that underlies all ego-oriented activity. Ignorance is very harsh and willing to stick with its own version of things. Therefore, it feels very righteous. Overcoming that is the essence of renunciation: we have no hard edges.

Warriorship is so tender, without skin, without tissue, naked and raw. It is soft and gentle. You have renounced putting on a new suit of armor. You have renounced growing a thick, hard skin. You are willing to expose naked flesh, bone, and marrow to the world.

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